

Connection press
Bob Edwards remarks

Good morning. I'm Bob Edwards, Port of Seattle Commissioner. I am very glad to be here today in support of Connections for the Future, and the Eastside Rail Corridor.

As one Commissioner, I'm proud to join with County Executive Ron Sims, Chuck Ayers of the Cascade Bicycle Club and all the others gathered here today, to endorse the purchase of the Eastside Rail Corridor.

Renton is where I got my start in public life. As a former Renton City Council member, and as a Port Commissioner, I can tell you what a tremendous opportunity we have with Eastside Rail Corridor.

It's an opportunity we can't afford to lose. For a whole host of reasons: for recreation, for the environment, and for economic development.

This corridor can become a spectacular new trail that our children, and our children's children, will enjoy.

We can create a truly regional trail and bicycle system. We will knit together communities on both sides of the lake with miles and miles of trail. For bike commuters, runners, strollers.

But there's even more. This corridor could, one day, become part of a high-capacity rail system.

When -- and if -- the citizens of this region decide they want transit here, the corridor will be available.

I wouldn't support this deal without iron-clad guarantees to preserve the potential for transit use in this corridor. Those guarantees already exist in the federal law, and they will be part of our regional plans.

I say *future* transit use, because the time isn't right for transit on this route.

Experts who have looked at the rail line say it's no longer economically viable as a freight route. That's why BNSF wants to sell the corridor. The railroad knows their business better than anyone.

For the Port of Seattle, our top rail priority is getting more freight capacity between Seattle and our major markets in the Midwest and East Coast.

That's never been more important than today. The ports of Seattle and Tacoma are facing real competitive challenges.

Ports in Vancouver, BC, and Prince Rupert are expanding their shipping terminals. They are very aggressive in pursuing the shipping lines that call at Seattle and Tacoma.

It's as serious a situation as I've seen in my eight years as a Commissioner. To compete, we have to increase our efficiency in handling cargo, while also keeping our costs low.

How do we do that? Enlarge Stampede Pass to handle double-stack trains. Work with the railroads on new rail yard between Seattle and Tacoma that will give us the capacity for handle more international cargo.

This deal among the Port, King County, Washington State and Burlington Northern makes it all possible. That's why I'm here today as an enthusiastic supporter for securing the Eastside Rail Corridor in public ownership.

We create a big win for the environment – and create hundreds of new family-wage jobs for our region. It's a tremendous investment for our future.

There are still lots of details to be worked out. This proposal is extremely complex. The possible swap for Boeing Field would be a major deal in its own right.

There isn't yet a formal proposal for the Port Commission or County Council to act upon. We all hope to see something later this summer for action.

But I am an optimist. There are a lot of very bright and creative minds working on this. Ron Sims and Tay Yoshitani, the Port's new CEO, are working very hard to make this a success for everyone.

Truly, this deal is too good to pass up.